

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-02 AID-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 OMB-01 /063 W

----- 050250

R 090756Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2504

INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 5982

E. O. 11652: ADS APRIL 9, 1977

TAGS: PINT, TH

SUBJ: ANALYSIS OF THE NAKHON SI THAMMARAT DEMONSTRATION

REF : A. BANGKOK 5521 (SONGKHLA 46); B. BANGKOK 5959
(SONGKHLA 49)

SUMMARY. STUDENTS AND POLITICAL ACTIVISTS CHOSE TO MAKE THE ARREST OF 17 RIOTERS IN THE SOUTHERN PROVINCE OF NAKHON SI THAMMARAT A TEST OF THEIR ABILITY TO PROMOTE A MORE JUST SOCIETY. PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT RESPONDED TO THEIR PROTEST BY RELEASING THOSE RIOTERS WHO COMMITTED A POLITICAL ACT AND BRINGING TO TRIAL ONLY THOSE AGAINST WHOM EVIDENCE OF CRIMINAL ACTIONS EXISTS. THIS DECISION LED TO A POLICE STRIKE IN THE SOUTH, WHICH ENDED ONLY WHEN KHUKRIT AGREED TO SATISFY SOME OF THE POLICEMEN'S DEMANDS. KHUKRIT HAS RESOLVED THE CURRENT CRISIS BY FLEXIBLY RESPONDING TO BOTH THOSE WHO DEMAND JUSTICE AND THOSE WHO SEE LAW AND ORDER AS PARAMOUNT. END SUMMARY.

1. STUDENTS AND POLITICAL ACTIVISTS CHOSE TO MAKE THE ARREST OF 17 RIOTERS CONNECTED WITH THE BURNING AND LOOTING OF THE GOVERNOR'S HOUSE IN NAKHON SI THAMMARAT ANOTHER TEST OF "PEOPLE POWER." SOME LIBERAL POLITICIANS INCLUDING DEMOCRAT AND
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SOCIALIST PARTY MP'S ALSO TOOK THE SIDE OF THE PROTESTORS,

PERHAPS FOR MORE IMMEDIATE POLITICAL REASONS. THE ACTIVISTS CLAIMED THAT FORMER GOVERNOR KLAI CHITPHITAK'S MISMANAGEMENT AND CORRUPTION IN HANDLING FLOOD RELIEF SUPPLIES CAUSED THE RIOT IN THE FIRST PLACE. THEY SEE HIM AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE OLD SYSTEM. THEY WONDER WHY THE "INVESTIGATION" OF ALLEGED RIOTERS AND LOOTERS, WHICH LED TO THE ARREST OF 17 PEOPLE WHO THEY SAY WERE ONLY DEMANDING JUSTICE AND FAIR TREATMENT, TOOK LESS TIME THAN THE INVESTIGATION AGAINST GOVERNOR KLAI. INDEED, THERE APPEARS TO BE NO ACTION AT ALL ON THE PUBLIC CHARGES AGAINST HIM. THE PROTESTORS POINT OUT THAT THE PROTEST WAS A POLITICAL ACT. THEY SEEM WILLING TO ACCEPT THAT BURNING AND LOOTING ARE CRIMINAL ACTS, AND THAT IF THE POLICE HAVE CLEAR EVIDENCE AGAINST THE SEVEN ALLEGED ARSONISTS AND LOOTERS, THEY SHOULD TRY THEM PUBLICLY. THEY BELIEVE THE AUTHORITIES HAVE NO RIGHT, HOWEVER, TO HOLD THE OTHER TEN PEOPLE WHO WERE ONLY DEMONSTRATING AGAINST CORRUPTION.

2. THE ELEMENTS OF A JUST AND LEGAL RESOLUTION OF THIS CONFRONTATION ARE EASILY DEFINED: RELEASE THE PEOPLE FOR WHOM NO CRIMINAL EVIDENCE EXISTS; TRY THE ALLEGED ARSONISTS AND LOOTERS; COMPLETE THE INVESTIGATION OF CHARGES AGAINST FORMER GOVERNOR KLAI, AND PUNISH HIM IF WARRANTED. KHUKRIT HAS TAKEN THE FIRST TWO OF THESE THREE ACTIONS. POLICEMEN AND SOME GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ARE UPSET OVER KHUKRIT'S DECISION ON THE FIRST TWO. THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE REPORTEDLY THREATENED TO RESIGN. SOME POLICE IN THE SOUTH WENT ON A FOUR-DAY STRIKE BEFORE KHUKRIT FINALLY ACCEPTED THEIR DEMAND THAT HE ANNOUNCE THAT HE HAD RELEASED THE PROTESTORS FOR POLITICAL REASONS, NOT FOR LACK OF EVIDENCE. HE ALSO PROMISED TO OUTLINE THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY FOR HANDLING FUTURE DEMONSTRATIONS.

3. REPRESENTATIVES OF AUTHORITY BELIEVE KHUKRIT HAS KNUCKLED UNDER; THEY SAY THAT DEMOCRACY WILL NEVER SUCCEED IF THAILAND DOES NOT MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER. THE POLITICAL ACTIVISTS CONCENTRATE ON THE ISSUE OF JUSTICE; THEY BELIEVE THAT THE STRIKING POLICEMEN WANT TO SACRIFICE IT ON THE ALTAR OF LAW AND ORDER. KHUKRIT HAS TRIED TO RESPOND TO BOTH NECESSITIES. HE HAS CONCEDED TO SOME OF THE STUDENT DEMANDS AND ALSO TO THE POLICE PROTESTORS.

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4. CONCLUSION: THE STUDENTS' REVOLUTION WILL CONTINUE IN OTHER PLACES AND AT OTHER TIMES. GOVERNOR KLAI AND HIS HOUSE ARE ONLY SYMBOLS OF THE OLD BUREAUCRATIC POLITICAL PROCESS THAT THE STUDENTS WANT TO ROOT OUT. THE CONSERVATIVES WILL GO ON ADVOCATING GREATER AUTHORITARIANISM. IF KHUKRIT CONTINUES TO PARTIALLY SATISFY BOTH THE PEOPLE WHO WANT SOCIAL CHANGE AND THOSE WHO WANT LAW AND ORDER, HE COULD SLOW DOWN THE INCREASING TENDENCY TOWARD POLITICAL POLARIZA-

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS, ARRESTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 09 APR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BANGKO05982
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: AS 19770409
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750123-0167
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750469/aaaackxs.tel
Line Count: 117
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 BANGKOK 5521, 75 (SONGKHLA 4, 75 BANGKOK 5959
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <07 JUL 2003 by KelleyW0>; APPROVED <13 NOV 2003 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ANALYSIS OF THE NAKHON SI THAMMARAT DEMONSTRATION
TAGS: PINT, TH, (KHUKRIT PRAMOT)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006